

THE 50+ Connection

NEWS and EVENTS from the
Howard County Office on Aging and Independence

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Building Communities of Strength to Connect Older Adults

This month, after an unprecedented year, Older Americans Month celebrates the resilience of older adults throughout our nation and the power of connection and engagement found in

“Communities of Strength.” Throughout the past year, Howard County’s Office on Aging and Independence embraced a multitude of challenges as opportunities for growth, emerging stronger as a result.

Throughout the pandemic, staying connected with those they serve has been the Office on Aging and Independence’s number one priority. While 50+ centers remained closed, the Office created an innovative platform to deliver virtual programs; facilitated drive-through meal distributions; and transitioned in-person services to electronic contact. These outreach efforts played a vital role in maintaining older adults’ health and well-being, and helped to combat social isolation in our community. “We are in this together” became OAI’s mantra while adapting service delivery methods to meet emerging needs.



While the numbers speak volumes, OAI Administrator Jenna Crawley knows there is still work to be done to meet the needs of a community forever changed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Helping our residents stay connected while staying home was just the start,” says Crawley, “As we move toward reopening our centers, we are cognizant of the fact that for many, virtual programs will remain a desirable option. This is especially true for older adults who live alone, or have mobility or transportation concerns. We want to continue to serve our community in the right way, at the right time and in the way they desire.”

Benchmarks Achieved by OAI in the Past Year

While these are impressive statistics, it's the people behind the numbers who really matter — individuals whose needs were addressed during a difficult time.

87,255 — The number of Grab & Go meals distributed (more than 860 unduplicated people served, ensuring the continuity of food access).

33,038 — Total attendance at the 50+ Center Virtual Programs. More than 836 clients participated via Webex in exercise classes, arts, crafts, and other webinars, including mental health and falls prevention.

15,800 — The total number of services documented through Maryland Access Point (MAP). MAP information specialists fielded 12,790 calls related to Covid-19 vaccines and information; housing; Grab & Go food access programs; In-Home Care and more.

11,964 — The total number of telehealth visits made by the Medicaid Supports Planning Unit, to coordinate services for clients who need support with activities of daily living to help prevent institutionalization and facilitate aging in the community.

1,521 — Calls fielded by the State Health Insurance Program (SHIP) team to provide free Medicare counseling by skilled volunteers.

1,473 — The number of activities conducted by OAI’s Ombudsmen to address complaints, provide advocacy and education for individuals and families with loved ones residing in long-term-care settings.

341 — The number of residents served by the Guardianship program, through routine virtual visits, telehealth visits with medical providers, and care plan meetings via phone.

285 — Community Living Program telehealth visits, providing home safety and environmental assessments via video and telephone consultations to follow-up on goals set during initial screenings.

275 — The total number of telehealth services provided by Supportive Services for Older Adults to assist those at-risk of requiring long term care services to remain in the community. Trained professionals provided assessment, care plan development, and coordination and monitoring of services.

A Message from Howard County Executive Calvin Ball



With the arrival of Spring, we’re feeling more hopeful with every passing day. As our community continues to get vaccinated, we are closer to ending this pandemic. By early April, we had already vaccinated 62.8% of Howard County residents age 65 and older. The strength and resilience of our older adult community over the past year has been incredible, and we’re all looking forward to seeing our loved ones and participating in small gatherings again.

Throughout the pandemic, our Office on Aging and Independence has supported more than 33,000 participants with virtual programming, events and activities to keep our older residents connected and engaged. Last month, we began to phase in reopening our 50+ centers for in-person programming, and we’re hopeful that very soon all of our residents will be able to be back inside our 50+ Centers. There are so many vital services that our community relies on, and supporting our older adults continues to be a priority of my administration.

In my proposed Fiscal Year 2022 capital budget, I’ve included \$6.5 million in funding to advance the renovation and expansion of the East Columbia 50+ Center from 3,800 sq. ft. to nearly 30,000 sq. ft. The new center design features a commercial kitchen, fitness center, technology hub and much more. The expansion of this center is long overdue, and I’m hopeful that it will move forward this year with approval from the Howard County Council. As we all know, a community center that allows our older residents to connect, learn and thrive is a key component to a high quality of life. The time is now to ensure that our older residents have the resources, support and care needed to thrive (see photo on next page).

This month there is so much optimism for the summer and fall ahead. Let’s continue to work together and keep one another safe. As always, we’re all in this together

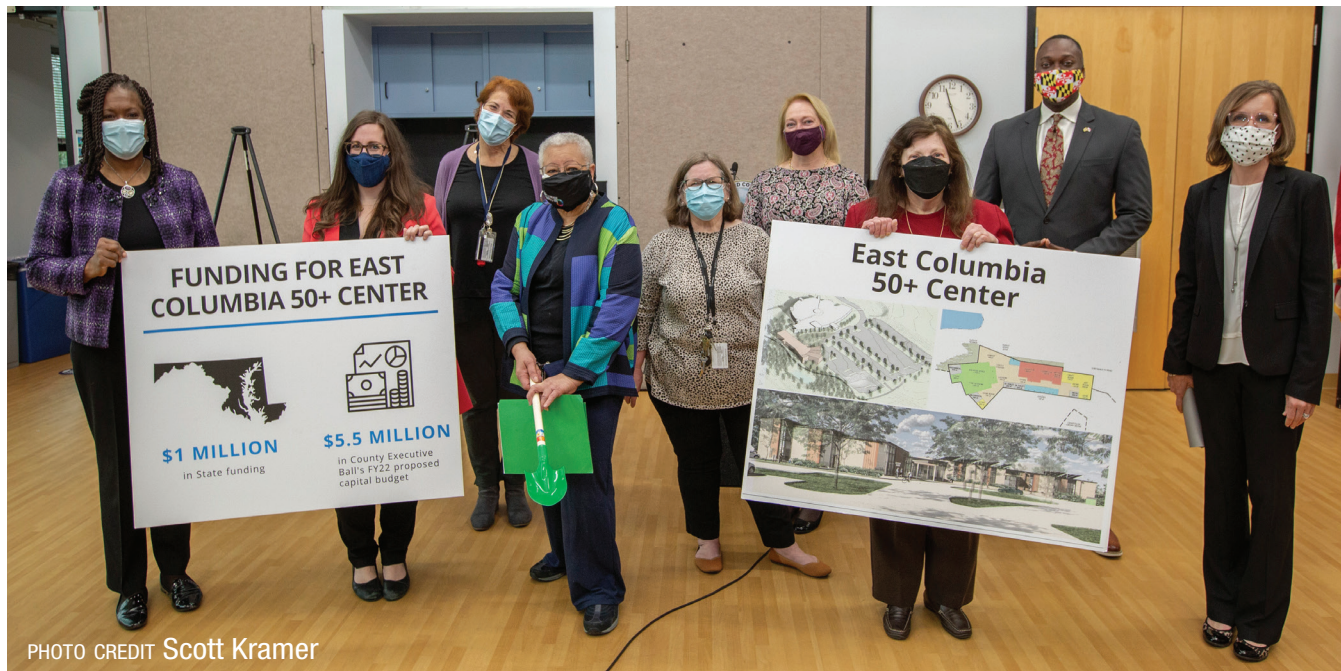


PHOTO CREDIT Scott Kramer

The new East Columbia 50+ Center will be part of an essential network of places and spaces leading the county's effort to become one of the nation's best Age-Friendly communities. Our communities of older adults are among the fastest-growing in the county, and this new facility will help to support our vibrant, active neighbors who are seeking new opportunities in fitness, career, lifestyle, and social engagement.

Jenna Crawley, ADMINISTRATOR
Office on Aging and Independence



THE EAST COLUMBIA 50+ CENTER was identified as one of the top priority projects in a Master Plan for the Office on Aging and Independence. If the proposed County funding is approved by the County Council, construction of the 50+ Center could begin as early as August 2021, with a projected opening date in the spring of 2023.

The expanded 50+ Center will be almost 30,000 sq. ft. and include:

- Commercial kitchen to support a congregate lunch program and provide capacity to address food insecurity issues for all older adults.
- Large community meeting space to support meal programs, events and community meetings, plus a social day program for at-risk adults.
- Technology hub for virtual program offerings and connectivity across sites.
- Expanded programs in art, lifelong learning, languages, fitness, evidence-based health promotion, and intergenerational activities.
- Fitness equipment room and exercise studio to support healthy aging for older adults.
- The building will also be equipped with a generator to serve the center and the community during emergencies.

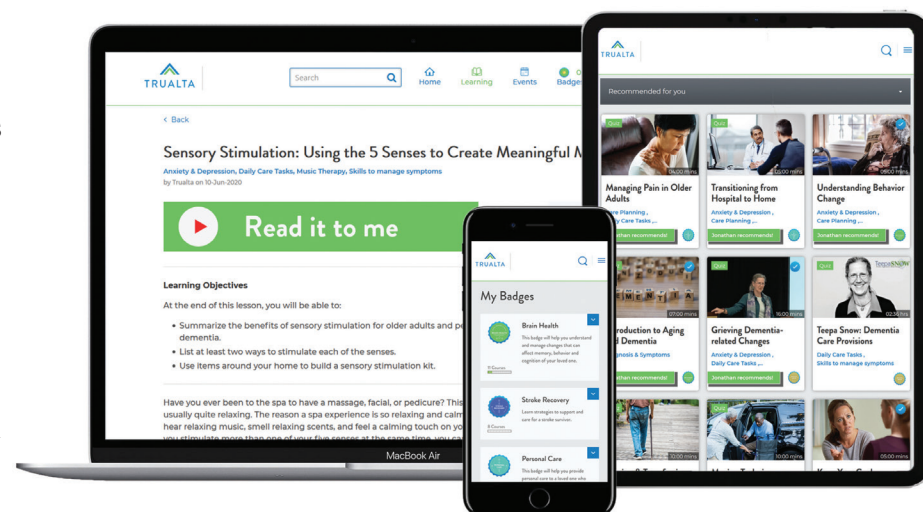
Try Trualta, a New Online Resource for Caregivers

The Howard County Caregiver Support program now offers free access to Trualta, an e-learning portal designed to help family caregivers reduce stress, find local resources, and provide better care for their loved ones. Once enrolled, Howard County caregivers can access the online service 24/7 to learn more about topics like personal care, safety in the home, caregiver wellness, and dementia care.

"The key to successful caregiver assistance is meeting caregivers where they are," says Kathy Wehr, Caregiver Support Program Manager for the Office on Aging and Independence, "Many are juggling challenging care situations with full-time jobs, so Trualta's on-demand access gives them flexible opportunities to build confidence, reduce stress, and improve their level of care."

This unique e-learning portal teaches in various modes, including audio, video, tip-sheets, music therapy, and professional-level training, enabling users to select the options that work best for them. "Trualta provides practical caregiver tips and techniques that you can start using right away," says Wehr, "But the learning library can also help you prepare and plan for what the future may bring."

For more information or to enroll, email kwehr@howardcountymd.gov or call 410-313-5955 (voice/relay).



Howard County's Cycle2Health Kicks Off Its Ninth Season May 18



Cycle2Health Howard County (C2H) is a non-competitive, peer-led, bicycling club, coordinated by the Office on Aging and Independence. Adults of all ages and riding abilities are welcome as rides vary in length and difficulty. Rides take place on weekdays during daytime hours and depart from various locations. The annual \$15 fee provides access to all rides scheduled during the 2021 riding season. Register at <https://bit.ly/31W0uMd>.

Due to Covid-19, registration is limited to the first 100 riders. Since we are requiring sign-up for rides you wish to attend this season, keeping the registration lower allows for better access to rides. We are closely monitoring guidelines provided by the CDC, Howard County Health Department and the County Executive's office to continue evaluating capacity for this season. There is a possibility for growth opportunities later this season; visit our website for the latest updates at www.howardcountymd.gov/C2H.

For updated information, including a list of upcoming rides, call 410-313-6073 (voice/relay) or email mburgess@howardcountymd.gov.